THE PERSISTENCE OF NAZI GERMAN

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Abstract

In Germany, during the Hitler period, the German language underwent a marked change with regard to usage, word formation, and style. It came to reflect not only the antisemitism of National Socialist ideology but it also significantly altered the original meaning of certain words. For example, the Nazi government introduced new words or imposed new meanings on old words in order to achieve the objective of camouflaging many of its policies, including the genocide. The results of this tampering with the language became so characteristic of the Hitler period that the German of that time has come to be identified in everyday usage as well as in the literature as "Nazi German."

Many of its features that were associated with the genocide ceased to exist after the end of Nazi rule, others have survived into present usage. In order to establish how this vocabulary of genocide has been recorded in or omitted from German reference works, we have traced a few terms through dictionaries of pre-Nazi and post-Nazi vintage. The results give an idea of how a nation like Germany deals with its darkest chapter in history in its standard dictionaries.

It is commonplace observation to say that living languages change and evolve. In this age of high technology, instant communication, rapidly changing fads and fashions, and global politics, this evolutionary process has been greatly accelerated. New words and expressions and new meanings enter and leave languages so fast that they set succeeding generations apart. Thus, parents often have difficulty understanding their children's peer group language, which may even be interspersed with borrowings from a foreign language.

When language changes are spontaneous they may arise from many and very diverse sources and both reflect changing attitudes and produce changes in attitudes. For instance, due to our growing awareness of and sensitivity to gender, race, or ethnic stereotyping, we now try to avoid using terms that were formerly accepted as uncontroversial. In this way, increasing concerns as well as common language usage can bring about official changes and may in turn result in additions to, or deletions from, dictionaries. Moreover, as is the case in some countries, such changes can be reflected in an official language reform. These will not be explored in this essay.

There is always a difference between the spoken and the written word. Although the oral language does evolve and in some cases change rapidly, there are, at the same time, sets of idioms and regional expressions that are impervious to such trends and are passed from generation to generation with only minor modifications. Such linguistic and semantic occurrences are undoubtedly part of the normal developments in all languages. They will not be explored in this paper either.

We are here interested in looking at language alterations that are influenced, engineered, and/or imposed by a government in order to fit in with an ideological agenda and to reinforce a political programme or conceal government actions. While such processes can be found also in other languages, the case to be examined here deals with the German language in general and with the Hitler period in particular. This relatively short time period, linguistically speaking, produced changes so characteristic that they have become known as Nazi-Deutsch.(1) Scholars have categorized and defined this language and produced compilations of its large body of terminology.(2)

As these various studies show, there are many ways of documenting this linguistic phenomenon. One that up to now has not been undertaken, is to check when or whether these terms entered German dictionaries and encyclopedias, when they disappeared from them, and then try to trace the reasons why.

Dictionaries do not necessarily tell us how words are or were remembered, forgotten, and used. Rather, they may be considered a guide to what the language should be -- not to what it is, whether oral or written. Dictionaries and encyclopedias are not widely consulted and thus have little or no influence on popular language use. The general public will

turn to them only rarely and then only when aspiring to so-called standard language. The use of dialects or colloquial idioms is probably not noticeably affected. Among a dictionary's audience can be publishers of books and periodicals who are concerned not only with their publications' correctness, but also with imposing a certain conformity on their writers. Schools and colleges tend to encourage the use of dictionaries in their teaching efforts. Intellectuals who are interested in the use of language will consult them as arbiters of past and current usage and meanings. Additionally, the extent of a dictionary's usage varies inversely with its size. Multi-volume editions may be available in libraries and publishing houses, but commonly receive the least use. Only when in doubt do some professionals or curious individuals resort to such a reference work. At the other extreme, one-volume pocket editions are most likely to be consulted more frequently. An interesting question will be to what extent these generalizations will be falsified by the increasing use of computers that include both spell-checkers, dictionaries, and thesauri.

This study focuses on German dictionaries from the late nineteenth century to the present day in order to follow a few selected terms that were manipulated by the Nazis, to check how they were recorded and defined, how they changed during the Hitler period, and whether this change was noted afterwards. Such research can only deal with a few typical examples. It is by no means intended to be comprehensive. We looked specifically at the euphemistic genocide vocabulary in order to trace the developments of such terms. Finally, we tried to establish how a nation, in this case Germany, deals with such language and pose the question as to how and whether the ensuing generations are affected by them.

It needs to be pointed out that the German language, as other languages for different reasons, contained many expressions that today would be considered politically incorrect because they reflected and underlined the ethnic homogeneity of the German population. Generally speaking, in the past, the country attracted few non-German tourists and no non-German settlers -- excepting the always more cosmopolitan city of Berlin -- with the result that foreigners were perceived as intrinsically alien. Yet, during the last third of the nineteenth and the first third of the twentieth century, there grew in the upper-middle class an increasing interest in foreign cultures and their art forms, particularly from Far Eastern countries. On a more general level, there was also a considerable curiosity about "exotic peoples" from other continents. This particular interest resulted in large attendance at the local zoo where such indigenous peoples from various parts of the world were periodically exhibited. Such an exhibit was referred to as V-lkerschau (literally, "looking at" peoples), and the specific place where they were viewed was the V-lkerschauplatz. This example illustrates the way language can adapt to social and cultural reality by the creation of new terms. Needless to add, these events have since then disappeared from the German social scene, as have the words which referred to them disappeared from the German language. In fact, they seem not even to have entered the dictionaries. Some people still remember them because in their youth they visited zoos in Germany and saw these exhibitions. The question to be asked then is where a younger generation can find quick and easily accessible references and explanations to such (and other) events and their associated terminology, events that once were not only a reality but publicly accessible to all citizens.(3)

A different example of language use in German, more ominous and this time dealing with a specific African people, the Hereros, is the term Vernichtung (extermination) in contemporary history writing. It was used to describe the campaign undertaken against these people by the German military during 1904-07 in what was then German South-West Africa. As most German dictionaries explain clearly, Vernichtung means extermination (nicht means nothing; thus, rendering to "nothing"). Yet, in this case, the term is given a vaguer definition by revisionist historians attempting to deny the severity of these events. These authors ascribe a much wider range of meaning to Vernichtung, as denoting "breaking of military, national, or economic resistance."(4) However, checking the major German dictionaries, particularly the comprehensive and reliable Deutsches W-rterbuch by Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm which furnishes sources of how and when a word or expression has been used, gives no reference of such a toned-down definition.(5) On the contrary, we find references to Vernichtungsstrategie which is explained as a military strategy to wipe out the enemy.(6) In fact, under the heading V-lkermord, genocide, we encounter the word Vernichtung in reference to the extinction of "a race, an ethnic or similar group." (7) Thus it seems that the advocates of the denial argument employ a deliberate misinterpretation of the word Vernichtung in order to rewrite this part of German colonial history and to deny this first genocide of the twentieth century that played a significant, albeit often ignored, role among the antecedents of the Holocaust.(8)

Of course, the word Vernichtung came to play an even greater role towards the end of the Hitler period when it was used to refer concretely to the plan and actual destruction of the Jews of Europe. At that time, euphemisms pertaining to discriminatory legislation and implementations characterized a large part of the Nazi German that was in official use. In general, the language in Germany mutated and changed meaning, nuance, and emphasis during the Third Reich. A large number of these changes were made in a deliberate and calculated manner by the representatives of the Nazi regime. Official communication began first with minor distortions, for the purpose of hiding political reality, and culminated later in what has been termed Exekutionsvokabular (terminology of execution) to obfuscate the truth about executions and murder.(9) In that context, especially after the Kristallnacht pogrom in Germany and Austria, in 1938, the official language became even more opaque and distorted. Therefore, as we know today, the infamous Nazi term Endl-šung der Judenfrage, or "Final Solution to the Jewish Question," was in reality the well-known euphemism for the planned genocide. The high Nazi officials who were present at the 1942 historic Wannsee-Konferenz in Berlin, discussed the unprecedented scheme for the systematic killing by means of hard labor under inhuman conditions and by industrialized mass murder.(10) According to Brackmann and

Birkenauer, the eventual meaning of Endl-sung was made fully known to the public only in 1946 with the Nuremberg War Crime Trials.(11) The conference minutes that recorded the agenda for the large-scale killings are perhaps the most chilling example of concealing with veiled language the criminal intentions of a government. This document was skillfully honed to make it sound almost innocuous if one did not know the implicit meaning behind the terminology and the carefully chosen words. It has become a perfect historic example of the disguised, official language, called Nazi-Tarnjargon ("camouflage jargon") in German -- a sub-category of Nazi German -- that the Nazi leaders and military personnel used in discussions, meetings, and written records, such as letters, memos, and (secret) reports. In most of these official and unofficial documents, euphemistic language was used to conceal the true object of the scheme for the physical destruction of Jewish life and culture, even from future readers. Indeed, contemporary Holocaust deniers use these very documents as proof for their viewpoint, arguing that "...any Nazi 'coded' document – that is, using euphemisms for practices associated with the extermination of Jews – is to be interpreted in its strictly literal meaning, whereas any document speaking plainly of the genocide is to be ignored or 'underinterpretated.'"(12) There was to be no record of the fate of the Jews, as the often cited remark by Heinrich Himmler suggested: "In our history this is an unwritten, never-to-be-written page of glory...."(13)

In addition to the secret language employed by government officials, there were the numerous issues of Sprachregelung (language regulations). One part of them dealt with the "Germanization" of the language by replacing foreign words (Fremdw-rter) with German ones: e.g. Lichtbild instead of Photo, Fernsprecher instead of Telephon, Fernsehrohr instead of Teleskop. However, not all the official suggestions were accepted by the public and some of them never established themselves in the German vernacular. Others entered common usage and remained beyond the Nazi period. For instance, Fernsprecher has only recently been changed to the more international term Telefon on public phone booths in Germany. The close ties between the countries that form the European Union and increased tourism are some of the considerations behind this and other changes. But even in the context of the contemporary language reform, German seems to be a special case: it is the only language subjected to changes arrived at by a governmental commission composed of representatives of Austria, Germany, and Switzerland. The new rules they adopted, although controversial, started to be phased in during the fall of 1998.

Parallel to the government interference in the German language during the Hitler period was the spoken word of the collectivity. Although there are many examples of how ordinary people were indeed affected and influenced by the language changes due to pro-German sentiments and antisemitism, there were colloquialisms and sayings that remained untouched despite the drastic changes of the political reality in Germany. Wolfgang Mieder, in an extensive study, shows that Hitler, in his book Mein Kampf and in his (frequent) speeches, added to this exclusive language of the Volk colloquialisms and proverbs that were known by, and therefore appealed to, a large spectrum of his country-wide audience.(14) Hitler would alter their words and meanings in order to adapt them to fit his message. But all of the proverbial expressions that Mieder discusses as having been misused by Hitler and used by his listeners during the Third Reich, are still present in the German language today. They show no influence of the distortions, allusions, or double meaning introduced during the Nazi period. Rather, they carry their original meaning; in fact, contemporary speech on the colloquial level is permeated with sayings and phrases such as Jedem das Seine (To each his own) and Arbeit macht das Leben s¸ss (Work makes life sweet). We know now that these examples and variations of them, as e.g. Arbeit macht frei (work makes free), were displayed in barracks and on gates of concentration camps. At best, they are an ironic if cruel reminder for former inmates and they use them only reluctantly today. Yet, despite the revelations of such cruel misuse, the German public has been unaffected in its everyday use of such sayings.

Another example of an expression that might be considered inappropriate or insensitive by some is related to the employment of poison gas as a particular mode of mass murder; i.e. the common German expression bis zur Vergasung, meaning "until you are blue in the face." It was coined before the Hitler period and used during that time. Today, despite the knowledge of the murder of millions through gassing, this expression is still part of Germany's spoken language. These examples show how colloquial expressions very often do persist despite their temporary misuse during the Holocaust period. Only linguistically and historically conscious individuals will make that link to the past and, because of it, refrain from using such phrases. German dictionaries and phrase books of course list such adages or idiomatic expressions, some of which have been in the language for centuries. But they do not comment on such historic or social meanings as have since then become attached to them.

In addition to the use or overuse of old expressions in public speeches, there existed in Nazi Germany the public rhetoric of the national socialist agenda and of antisemitism. It was based both on the notion of the German Volk (people) as a superior race (Rasse) and the late 19th century German concept of Blut und Boden (blood and soil). It hardly needs repeating that National Socialists voiced a crude antisemitism that turned Jews into diabolic outsiders and polluters or defilers of German blood. The well publicized Nuremberg Laws for the Protection of German Blood and Honour, in 1935, articulated and set into action the regime's plan to exclude all those defined as Jewish from German social and economic life. Naturally, the obvious benefactors of these race laws were any and all racially defined Germans, a Volksgemeinschaft, or "community of people distinguished by blood." When it came to public language, the regime and its representatives took their clue from Hitler's Mein Kampf by overusing and abusing the nationalistic key terms Volk, Blut, and Rasse(15) They combined them with other words to form new racist concepts. Many of these compounds became part of the terminology of German law. Typical examples are Blutschutz (protection of German blood), Volksfeind (enemy of the German people), and Rassenschande, (sexual

violation of the German race). Thus, on the domestic as well as the international level, Jews were perceived as enemies of the German people, Volksfeinde, that had to be eliminated.

But already prior to the Nazi agenda of their actual destruction (Vernichtung), there was a government controlled public discourse that reflected the situation of the Jews in Germany in all walks of life. We have to distinguish between the crass language used in the antisemitic race propaganda, as in the Nazi weekly Der St¸rmer, on posters and pamphlets, and also in educational texts for children, for example, and the more innocuous sounding and therefore easily acceptable terms that entered public communication. They all were linked to the race laws and government regulations that differentiated strictly and ruthlessly between Jews and non-Jews, most of the latter referred to as "Aryans." The new word creations were mostly composites of German words that came to describe the then current ideological concepts. The above mentioned examples are typical. Willingly or not, the population had to deal with and use new terms such as Deutscher Gruss (Hitler salute), Abstammungsnachweis (certificate of origin), Erbtauglichkeit (ability or permission to reproduce) in certain public or private interactions, to cite but a few. Whether individuals accepted all of the discriminatory policies or not, they had to live with them and apply the new terminology.

In this way, the language began to reflect the decreed race split, often without directly referring to Jews. But there were words that undoubtedly did so in hidden form and they were easily integrated into everyday language. A telling example is the beautiful sounding term Sterntr"ger, literally meaning "bearer or carrier of a star." In fact, it referred to those Jews who were ordered to wear the yellow star from September 19, 1941 on. It is the worst memory of degradation, particularly for many surviving German Jews.(16) For the German public, it was an easy term to use, and one that permitted not having to ponder the crass reality behind it. The same holds true for the more widely known term Kristallnacht. Even today, using this in fact beautiful and romantic sounding word avoids spelling out the brutal fact behind it: state-controlled pogrom in Germany and Austria.

All of these and other words, concepts, and definitions can be found in the above cited compilations of Nazi vocabulary. By far the most accurate and extensive one is Brackmann and Birkenauer's, NS-Deutsch. It not only provides precise explanations of how these words were used during the Nazi period, it also often takes into account the people targeted and victimized by the use of NS-Deutsch. Conversely, the extensive collection with a title that seems itself from the Nazi period, Das Grosse Lexikon des Dritten Reiches ("The Great Encyclopaedia of the Third Reich"), in many entries lacks the informed detail that is present in the previously discussed work. In fact, most relevant passages sound as if written in Nazi German. The use of inappropriate vocabulary is noticeable in many other German publications on the subject, as for example in German school books.(17) Although clearly stating their rejection of the Nazi period, these German authors are unable to find a neutral language and a compassionate tone in their dealings with Nazi atrocities. Very few scholars have remarked on this phenomenon, such as Walter F. Renn (18) and Elisabeth Maxwell.(19) Both associate this use of the Nazi language with siding with the perpetrator instead of showing an understanding for the side of the victims and survivors of the Holocaust. They warn about continuing the use of Nazi terminology, particularly euphemisms, such as Endl-sung instead of "destruction or mass murder of the European Jews." Renn states:

> The designation is so firmly entrenched in texts and scholarly literature that it will probably never entirely be replaced; but its use is no less objectionable since it renders harmless the unspeakable reality of the Holocaust and continues to use the terminology of the murderers. Perhaps, most important, it subtly perpetuates the idea that there was a Jewish problem -- instead of an anti-Semitic problem -- and conveys the obscene notion that genocide may be referred to legitimately as a "solution". Nothing could be less edifying than, in effect, making the killers the final judges for designating the terms of description for what they did to the Jews of Europe. The term was Hitler's, and its use is a posthumous victory.(20)

But it is exactly this persisting German terminology of genocide that seems to be either difficult to find or not sufficiently explained in German dictionaries. It is a terminology that especially experts in the fields of history, sociology, and other disciplines need when studying this period, particularly when their knowledge of German is limited. During the Nuremberg War Crime Trials, the Allied officials in charge of the procedures needed special glossaries both in order to understand the Nazi vocabulary and also to identify the NS ranking system of the German military with regard to those charged with war crimes and crimes against humanity.(21) In using general German dictionaries as sources of information about Nazi-Deutsch, it proves to be important that one take into consideration their date and place of publication. Before German reunification in 1989, the political orientation of dictionaries was influenced by whether they were issued in East Germany or West Germany. Needless to add that the designated language committee usually did not want to violate governmental regulations. In addition, the editors tended to be academics and intellectuals, often contemporaries of the Nazi regime, whose editorial decisions would reflect not only their professional judgments but also their emphasis on academic respectability and legitimacy.

Before considering the inclusion or exclusion of words in dictionaries it is important to understand the role of so-called compound words in German. In that language it is possible to string together two or more words to form new words or concepts. This has several consequences:

a– Two or more words may form a new word whose meaning is so obvious that it does not usually appear in dictionaries. e.g.: Tischtuch (table cloth)
b– Two or more words may form a new word whose meaning is so obvious that it does not appear in any dictionary, but the new word has disappeared from the language because the phenomenon it refers to has disappeared, e.g.: V–lkerschau. ("looking at" peoples) and V–lkerschauplatz (place where such people were exhibited).
c– Two or more words may form a new word whose meaning is totally obscure without an understanding of the specific context, e.g.: Gleichschaltung (coordination, to bring in line with Nazi ideology).
d– Two or more words may form a new word whose meaning is so obvious that it does not appear in any dictionary, but it has acquired a new meaning in Nazi–Deutsch, e.g.: Endl–sung (final solution).

In the latter case, the following problem arises: memories of these words are attached to a particular context and therefore are primarily meaningful to the generation that lived through the Hitler period, and to its scholars, especially those concerned with the Holocaust.(22) These specific concepts denoting the genocide meant at first little or nothing to the post–war generation. Its education treated that period with silence until individuals proceeded to inform themselves about their country's dubious past. The problem of generational difference can lead to serious misunderstandings and misinterpretations of language. This is not necessarily resolved by recourse to dictionaries because often they tend to omit such words altogether. When they do include them, their definition is usually not adequate, or they may give either the neutral (denotative) or the attached (connotative) meaning, but not necessarily both of them. This raises the intriguing question of who decides on such issues of inclusion or exclusion on what bases and upon what considerations.

It turns out that such questions are not at all easy to answer. We had hoped that the "Introductions" to the various dictionaries would provide some clues. But the six–volume Brockhaus' Konversations–Lexikon of 1893 has no "Introduction" at all; neither does the 20–volume Der Grosse Brockhaus have one. The importance of an introduction has been emphasized by American scholars. However, German works usually leave the reader in suspense as to the intention of the book or make only a brief preliminary or concluding statement. This difference in style and outlook becomes more obvious when we are dealing with translations. For example, the Enzyklopaedie des Holocaust is the German translation of the original Encyclopedia of the Holocaust and therefore contains all the introductory explanations. Conversely, if a work is translated from the German, the omissions in the original are rectified in English. An example is The Encyclopedia of the Third Reich that has a detailed "Preface to the English Translation" that goes beyond a mere translator's note.

The German dictionaries that we have consulted seem to follow a German tradition of providing either a brief introductory statement or none at all. The Brockhaus Wahrig of 1980, for example, consists of six volumes and devotes only a little over one page to a Vorwort (Preface) which defines its task as presenting and describing the diversity of the German language. In its acknowledgments it singles out the Gesellschaft f¸r deutsche Sprache (The society for the German language) for special thanks. The DUDEN: Das grosse W–rterbuch der deutschen Sprache of 1977 comprises six volumes but devotes only one page to a Vorwort that names it a W–rterbuch der deutschen Gegenwartssprache –– mit historischer Tiefe (Dictionary of the German language of the present –– with historical depth). It emphasizes that the concentration lies in der zweiten H"lfte des 20. Jahrhunderts (on the language of the second half of the twentieth century.) It also mentions that it is intended to serve as a basic reference work for Ausl"nder (foreigners) who are learning German. With this in mind, one would indeed expect to find words that deal with Germany's twentieth century history. It was Joseph Wulf who mentioned in his 1963 book Aus dem Lexikon der M–rder ("From the Encyclopaedia of Murderers") that anyone dealing with (the German) language of the 20th century must deal with the terms collected in the Encyclopaedia of Murderers. What is even more important is his conviction that all of these words from the Nazi period will have to be registered in the Grimmschen W–rterbuch, the comprehensive German dictionary that records first occurrences and different meanings of German words. Wulf cites one of the typical euphemistic words of Nazi–Deutsch, namely Sonderbehandlung (special treatment) that, according to him, was coined in 1939.(23) But contrary to his prediction or hope, this dictionary does not list this word.

As mentioned above, a part of Nazi–Deutsch is characterized by what Germans call Tarnw–rter, which, roughly translated, means "camouflage words"; i.e. words meant to hide something. This is very different from the usage in the sciences where new words are coined to identify new discoveries or inventions. Tarnw–rter are generally old, familiar words that are given new meanings while the old meaning also remains in use. That means that it is only possible to ascertain a word's meaning by reference to its context and its usage. It is this ambiguity that provides the camouflage.

A well–known example is the word Endl–sung (Final Solution) whose meaning of settling a problem or issue once and for all was current long before the Hitler period and remains, although rarely, long after it – except that since that time the word has remained virtually taboo in Germany. It evokes distinct memories and associations of its other, super–imposed meaning from the time of the Holocaust. In fact, most of its citations in the dictionaries point to the usage under Nazi rule. For example, the 1983 Duden, before mentioning the neutral meaning of "final solution" [to any problem] and cautioning the reader with the reference "[used] seldom" in parenthesis, explains Endl–sung as "the plan for the eradication of European Jews" ([Plan zur] Ausrottung der europ"ischen Juden) and in brackets "ns verh.," which means: "from the national socialist period; veiled." This entry is an example of how the authors actually use Nazi–Deutsch in their explanations or descriptions, rather than contemporary German appropriate for this subject. "Eradication" of the Jewish people was the Nazis' word and view.

Taking this term as an example of the German vocabulary of genocide, we find no entry in Tr¸bners Deutsches W-rterbuch, issued in 1940 during World War II. It was also omitted forty years later from the, according to the editors, "completely revised" Brockhaus Enzyklop"dia in 1973, as well as the Duden edition of 1980. The standard college dictionary, Wahrig, published in 1997, eight years after Germany's unification, does not mention Endl-sung either. As the chronological scrutiny of the occurrence of Endl-sung in these representative German reference works shows, the record of this infamous word is incomplete.

A different but also telling example is the Nazi euphemism Sonderbehandlung (special treatment). It is particularly linked to the concentration camps and the Holocaust. The originally positive denotation of this compound word ceased to exist because "special treatment", in almost all cases during the Third Reich, especially in the war years, meant execution or murder. Top secret execution records contain Sonderbehandlung on one page and the (foreign) word exekutiert on the next where it is stated that the order has been carried out. SS officials sometimes wrote orders to kill by using only the two letters S.B., so that state murder was hidden behind those two initials.(24) While Sonderbehandlung and other composites with the prefix Sonder- were used in this euphemistic form, this prefix in combination with other words continued to be used in its neutral or positive meaning of "special," sometimes even in the same German document. For instance, in the correspondence between Germany and the ghetto administration of Lodz, we find the words Sonderaktion, Sonderzulage, Sondereinsatz, Sonderkonto.(25) Sonderzulage and Sonderkonto simply mean "special ration" and "special account," whereas the two other words deal euphemistically with pogrom-like mass killings of Jews in Eastern Europe. In this context, we also read about Sonderz¸ge to Warthbr¸cken which of course refers to the forced transports of Jews by train to concentration camps.(26) To complicate these language matters further, "[t]here came a point later when even the euphemism Sonderbehandlung (special treatment) was no longer considered acceptable. On 10 April 1943, Himmler ordered that this term be replaced by the phrase 'transported to the east.'" (27)

When we follow the recording of Sonderbehandlung in the various standard dictionaries in Germany we find a similar pattern as with Endlšsung. Der Grosse Brockhaus, issued in the early years of the Hitler period in 1934, the Tr¸bners Deutsches W-rterbuch of 1956, as well as the 1973 Brockhaus EnzyklopŠdie, and the 1997 Wahrig do not list Sonderbehandlung at all. But the Duden of 1980 does. It gives first the original, denotative meaning of the word namely, besondere, die betreffende Person bevorzugende Behandlung (special, preferential treatment of a person). The second explanation of the word appears enigmatic unless one knows the subject matter it deals with. The dictionary furnishes a synonym for Sonderbehandlung with the word Liquidierung (liquidation), and in parenthesis again the standard abbreviation ns verh¸ll meaning "camouflaged" and "pertaining to the National Socialist period." But substituting Sonderbehandlung with liquidation suggests explaining one euphemism with another Nazi term for murder. Today we cannot speak of the "liquidation" of people as if it were common practice. The reader would have to look up Liquidierung in order to find the past meaning of the word. This entry illustrates again that its author or authors are not using contemporary German to define the Nazi euphemism for murder.

The next word under scrutiny is Aktion and we shall see that its recording in the German dictionaries is even more complex. Aktion had a deadly significance for the Jews during the Nazi period and has been considered "the most cruel word the Jewish people remember from the period of the Catastrophe."(28) It is one of those terms whose meaning shifted over a decade of Nazi use. From 1933 on, it came to signify state organized aggression against declared enemies of the German nation, which included political opponents and Jews. At the time of the violence, vandalism, and detention associated with the Kristallnacht in 1938, Aktion had become synonymous with a state controlled pogrom, directed against the Jews in Germany and Austria. History shows further that, during the war, Aktion or Sonderaktion, represented for all European Jews the ever present danger of roundups for deportation to ghettos and killing centers that the Nazis had established in Eastern Europe. For this reason, one researcher of this term, Blumenthal, equates Aktion with "the murder of all Jews." This particular word in its genocidal Nazi context has been preserved in all its horror not only in survivors' memory and written accounts, but also in Jewish literature such as tales, poems, and ghetto songs.(29) Despite this wide ranging use and meaning, this word has lived on in Germany, but it has mutated yet again to override the Nazi meaning. To illustrate, Aktion and Sonderaktion are now used with new definitions in the world of business and commerce. The contemporary Aktion has come to mean an assertive move to promote a cause or product; Sonderaktion means a special business offer in advertisements. Also, German youths have incorporated the English language "action" into their peer jargon. Strangely enough, Sonderaktion does not appear in any of the dictionaries under examination, including the 1997 Wahrig. However, the fairly recent Englsh language "action" is listed as a new addition to the German language. The German Aktion appears in this dictionary in its neutral meaning of Handlung, Vorgehen, Unternehmung, Massnahme, Ereignis (action, measures, happening, steps). The 1973 edition of the Brockhaus Enzyklop"die has a shorter entry. It mentions only Handlung, T"tigkeit, Tat (deed, act, action). It left out Vorgehen (measure) which Der grosse Brockhaus of 1928 had included as part of its entry. An interesting explanation of Aktion can be found in the Duden of 1980. After linking the meaning of gemeinschaftliche geplante Unternehmung, Massnahme (jointly planned undertaking or measure) to this term, it gives as an example of such a jointly planned undertaking the proper noun Aktion S¸hnezeichen. This term stands for the contemporary German youth program that is devoted in part to German-Jewish reconciliation. However, no negative example from the Nazi past is cited.

Another German word whose path we traced is Umsiedlung. In its neutral and original meaning it stands for resettlement. This meaning can be found in most of the German dictionaries, including the 1997 Wahrig, but it is not listed in the T¸bner of

1956. During the Nazi period, those in charge of planning and executing the genocide gave it an additional, euphemistic meaning that stood first and foremost for "the forceful removal of German Jews to be murdered in the east of Europe." As we know, the Nazi regime's public explanation was "resettlement of the Jews to an Eastern European country to work," implying, of course, to live. This apparent meaning of Umsiedlung, which was at first believed by most of the victims, was a harsh enough reality since it meant being uprooted at short notice and without preparation. But, of course, it meant much more. Although this word, together with the euphemistic use of "transport" belonged to the core of the Nazis' genocide vocabulary, the dictionaries from the post-war period do not mention it. Even the 1980 Duden that lists other Nazi euphemisms, omits Umsiedlung.

These few but telling examples demonstrate that, since the end of World War II, the nomenclature pertaining to the persecution and destruction of the Jews has either persisted as Nazi German, taken on different meanings, or has vanished altogether from the German language. These observations reveal Germany's difficulty not only in dealing with the language of the Hitler period, but also in coming to terms with the events of that era. Although today steps are undertaken to include Holocaust education in German schools, the official record of Nazi Germany's genocide vocabulary in German reference works remains incomplete. The question remains whether and where future generations will try to find clear definitions and interpretations if the nation's standard dictionaries are inadequate in providing them. That these are important questions can be seen in contemporary German issues, such as the rise of neo-Nazi groups, international links to white supremacy groups, the hostility towards immigrants, the debates about the revisions of the citizenship law, the controversy about the Berlin Holocaust museum, among others.

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